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This paper discusses some generic humanistic principles and conditions of learning which should undergird a field based educational and staff development process designed to enable teachers in a variety of situations, circumstances, and schools to improve themselves personally and professionally. (Author/JD)

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PRINCIPLES AND CONDITIONS OF FIELD BASED LEARNING

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PRINCIPLES AND CONDITIONS OF FIELD BASED LEARNING

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This paper discusses some generic humanistic principles and conditions of learning which we believe should undergird a field based educational and staff development process designed to enable teachers in a variety of situations, circumstances, and schools to improve themselves personally and professionally.

Principles of Field Based Learning

Principle 1. Field based learning is the process of changing behavior in positive directions. By behavior we mean attitudes, ideas, values, skills, and interests. Positive directions mean directions which enhance and enrich the lives of students, teachers, schools, and communities.

The implicit goal of field based learning is to enable students, teachers, schools, and communities to become more fully functioning, contributing, productive, effective, and actualizing.

Principle 2. Field based learning is an experience activated by the learner. The process of learning is primarily controlled by the learner and not by the field based instructor. Changes in perception and behavior are more products of human meaning and perceiving than of any forces exerted upon the individual. Learning is not only a function of what an instructor does to or says to or provides for teachers; more significantly, field based learning has to do with something which happens in the unique world of each teacher. It flourishes in a situation in which field based instruction is seen as a facilitating process that assists teachers to explore and discover the personal and professional meaning of events for them.

No one directly teaches anyone anything of significance (Rogers, 1969). If instruction is defined as a process of directly communicating an experience or a

fragment of knowledge, then it is clear that little learning occurs as a result of this process and the learning that does take place is usually inconsequential. People learn what they want to learn, they see what they want to see, and they hear what they want to hear. Learning cannot be imposed on teachers no more than it can be imposed on children. When we impose ideas on people, we indoctrinate them. When we create an atmosphere in which teachers are free to explore, nourish, and develop ideas in dialogue and through interactions with colleagues, we facilitate learning. Very little learning takes place in field based programs without personal involvement and meaning on the part of the teacher. Unless what is being taught has personal and professional meaning for teachers, they will shut it out from their field of perception. Teachers will forget most of the content "taught" to them, but they will retain the content that they use in their work, the content that is relevant to them personally, and the content which addresses their professional needs.

Principle 3. Field based learning is the discovery of the personal meaning and relevance of ideas. Teachers more readily internalize and implement concepts and ideas which are job embedded and relevant to their needs and problems. Field based learning is a process which requires the exploration of ideas in relation to self, colleagues, the school, and community so that teachers can determine what their needs are, what goals they would like to formulate, what issues they would like to discuss, and what content and skills they would like to learn. What is relevant and meaningful is decided by teachers and must be discovered by teachers.

This means that the field based curriculum as a set of experiences emerges from teachers. Rather than fitting teachers to externally prescribed programs or experiences, field based inservice programs need to offer a growth-fostering climate in which teachers are free to construct their own curriculum.

Principle 4. Field based learning is experiential. Teachers become self directed when they assume responsibility for their learning; they become independent when they experience professional autonomy; they become able when they experience success; they begin to feel important when they are important to somebody; they feel liked when someone likes them. Teachers do not change their behavior merely because someone tells them to do so or tells them how to change. For effective field based learning, giving information is not enough; e.g., teachers become responsible and independent in their own development as professionals when, through field based inservice, they experience themselves as proactive, self-directed learners who determine the factors, including organizational climate, that impact on their performance and on the performance of students. The most effective field based learning is experiential.

Principle 5. Field based learning is a cooperative and collaborative process. Cooperation fosters learning--"Two heads are better than one." Teachers enjoy functioning independently, but they also enjoy functioning interdependently. The interactive process "Scratches and nicks" teachers' curiosity, potential, and creativity. Cooperative approaches for learning are enabling. Through such approaches, teachers learn to define goals, to plan, to interact and to try group arrangements in problem-solving. Paradoxically, as teachers invest themselves in collaborative group approaches, they develop a firmer sense of their own professional identity. They begin to realize that they count as professionals, that they have something to give and to learn. Problems which are identified and delineated through cooperative learning interactions appear to challenge and to stretch teachers to produce creative solutions and to become more creative individuals.

Principle 6. Field based learning is an evolutionary process. Professional improvement and change require time and patience. Field based learning is not a revolutionary process. When quick changes in behavior are demanded, we often

resort to highly structured procedures through which we attempt to impose learning. Whether such learning is lasting and meaningful is doubtful. Implicit in all the principles and conditions for field based instruction is an evolutionary model of learning. Learning situations characterized by free and open communication, active and personal involvement, freedom from threat, and trust in the self are evolutionary in nature.

Principle 7. In field based learning, one of the richest resources for learning are the learners themselves. In a day and age when so much emphasis is being placed upon instructional media, canned instructional packages, consulting expertise, books, and speakers as resources for learning, we tend to overlook perhaps the richest resource of all--the learner. Each individual has an accumulation of experiences, ideas, feelings, and attitudes which comprise a rich vein of material for problem-solving and learning. All too often this vein is barely tapped. Field based inservice approaches which enable teachers to become open to themselves, to draw upon their personal experiences and collection of data, and to share their data in cooperative interaction with others maximize learning and personal and professional development.

Principle 8. The process of learning is emotional as well as intellectual. Field based learning is affected by the total state of the individual. People are feeling beings as well as thinking beings and when their feelings and thoughts are in harmony, learning is maximized. To create the optimal conditions for field based learning to occur, people must come before purpose (Gendlin, 1968). Regardless of the purpose of field based instruction, it cannot be effectively accomplished when other things get in the way. If the objective of a teaching team is to design and carry out a specific task, it will not be optimally achieved if teachers on the team are fighting and working against each other. If the purpose of the team is to examine current issues and problems in a given field with reason and honesty, then it will not be achieved if teachers are afraid to commun-

icate openly. Barriers to communication exist in people and before the "official business" of field based instruction can be conducted, we need to work with the people problems that may exist in a group or school staff

Principle 9. Field based learning fuses work and play. People have always liked to work. Joy in accomplishment is deeply rooted in human nature. Yet, in the learning of values, one of the most confusing areas centers on the perceptions people have of work in relation to learning. Several psychological studies indicate that well-integrated, emotionally healthy people seem to see little difference between work and play. It is interesting to note that young children are so eager for accomplishment that it is often impossible for many of them to draw a line between work and play. This is because their work is of their own choosing. It has not been forced upon them.

We can help teachers to learn that play and work are on the same continuum by providing an atmosphere in which their field based learning experiences evolve in accordance with their needs, capacities, and interests. By doing this, we make field based learning a satisfying experience. By developing a field based learning climate which encourages the full use of the unique abilities of teachers, we make work more meaningful. By the recognition which teachers achieve through cooperative interaction rather than competition, we heighten this sense of industry.

Principle 10. Field based teaching is learning. Since learning is defined here as the process of changing behavior in positive directions, it follows that field based teaching is learning. The problem in this statement is with the word "teaching" which, in the traditional sense, refers to a didactic procedure built upon an external stimulus-internal response notion of motivation that results in a view of learners as organisms to be made into something. This view suggests that learners cannot be trusted to decide what is good and relevant for themselves, someone else (the curriculum maker) must decide; then some other people (instruc-

tors) must determine what forces should be exerted to keep learners moving through this "good experience."

An enhancing field based learning situation is characterized by a curriculum that is defined by the teachers' choices of good and relevant experiences and by the presence of a field based instructor who is a learner. Teachers are free and responsible persons who bring to any interaction and relationship an accumulation of experiences, ideas, feelings, attitudes, and perspectives. Learning occurs when free and responsible people are open to themselves, draw upon their personal collection of data and share their data in cooperative interaction. As a learner, the person designated "instructor" shares data when they are needed by teachers and, in turn, draws upon the data that teachers contribute for his/her own growth and development.

Conditions Which Facilitate Field Based Learning

Condition 1. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which encourages people to be active. The learning process thrives when there is less instructor domination and talk and more faith that teachers can find alternatives and solutions which are satisfying to themselves. Listening to teachers and allowing them to use the instructor and the group as a resource and sounding board facilitates the active exploration of ideas and possible solutions to problems. People are not passive and reactive receptacles into which we can pour the "right" values, the "right" answers, and the "right" ways of thinking. People are active and creative beings who need the opportunity to determine goals, issues to be discussed, and the means of evaluating themselves. Teachers learn in field based situations when they feel they are a part of what is going on--when they are personally involved.

Condition 2. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which promotes and facilitates the individual's discovery of the personal meaning of ideas.

This means that the instructor, rather than directing teachers, helps them to discover the personal meaning of ideas and events for them. Effective field based learning occurs when the instructor creates a situation in which teachers freely express their needs rather than have their needs dictated to them. Field based learning is an activity in which the needs of the teacher and the school staff are the bases for deciding what issues will be explored and what the subject matter of the on-site staff development program will be.

No matter how permissive or unstructured a learning activity may be, there exist implicit goals in the activity itself--an instructor is never goalless. Field based learning occurs when the goals of the instructor accommodate, facilitate, and encourage the individual's discovery of personal goals and personal meaning in experiences and events. The art of field based instruction requires the development of goals which provide sufficient elbow room for teachers to explore and internalize behavior satisfying and growth-producing to themselves.

Condition 3. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which emphasizes the uniquely personal and subjective nature of learning. In such a situation, each teacher has the feeling that his/her ideas, his/her feelings, his/her perspectives have value and significance. People need to develop an awareness that all that is to be learned is not outside or external to themselves. Teachers develop such an awareness when they feel their contributions and their value as professionals are genuinely appreciated.

Condition 4. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere in which difference is good and desirable. Situations which emphasize the "one right answer," the "magical solution," or the "one good way" to act or to think or to behave narrow and limit exploration and inhibit discovery. If teachers are to look at themselves, at others, and at ideas openly and reasonably, then they must have the opportunity to express their opinions no matter how different they may be. This calls for a school climate and instructional atmosphere in which

different ideas can be accepted (but not necessarily agreed with). In an effective staff development program, differences in ideas must be accepted if differences in people are to be, too.

Condition 5. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which consistently recognizes people's right to make mistakes. Where mistakes are not permitted, then the freedom and the willingness of people to make choices are severely limited. Professional growth and change are facilitated when error is accepted as a natural part of the learning process. Field based learning requires the challenge of new and different experiences, the trying of the unknown, and, therefore, necessarily must involve making mistakes. In order for teachers to grow and improve professionally, they need the opportunity to explore new situations and ideas without being penalized or punished for mistakes which are integral to the activity of field based learning. The instructor and/or school administrator who feels and acts on the need to be always right creates a limiting and threatening condition for effective staff development.

Condition 6. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which tolerates ambiguity. In field based staff development programs characterized by a rigid and defensive atmosphere, teachers feel they cannot take time to look at many solutions, highly uncomfortable without answers, and that there is more concern for "right" answers than for good answers. The open and fearless exploration of issues, ideas, and solutions calls for time to explore many alternatives and time to proceed without feeling any pressure from instructors or administrators for immediate and forthcoming answers.

Condition 7. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere in which evaluation is a cooperative process with emphasis on self-evaluation. If field based learning is a personal process, then teachers need the opportunity to formulate the criteria to measure their progress. Criteria established by a field based instructor will be mostly artificial and irrelevant to teachers in an on-

site staff development program. Too often behavioral change and growth are measured by the degree to which people can regurgitate what others have tried to spoonfeed to them. It is obvious that anyone can play the game of "giving the instructor what he wants." More viable and meaningful evaluations occur when teachers are free to examine themselves and the roles they assume with other people and in the classroom and school. Self-evaluation and peer evaluation enable teachers to really judge how much they have learned and grown; e.g. through audio and/or video taped recordings of their behavior, teachers can see themselves in the process of learning. Such recordings provide tangible and concrete evidence of progress and provide a rich source of material to school staff for learning. New insights evolve as teachers see themselves as they really are. For field based learning to occur, teachers need to see themselves accurately and realistically. This can be best accomplished through self and group evaluation.

Condition 8. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which encourages openness of self rather than concealment of self. Professional improvement, problem-solving, and learning require that personal feelings, attitudes, ideas, questions, and concerns be openly brought to light and examined. To the degree that an idea, a thought, a feeling, or an attitude related to the topic at hand is held back and not openly expressed--to that degree are the processes of field based learning and discovery inhibited. Teachers need to feel that they can try something, fail if necessary without being embarrassed, or diminished as persons. Openness of self occurs in a staff development atmosphere free from psychological threat. Teachers can invest themselves fully and openly in the collaborative and interactive process of field based learning when they know that no matter what they say or express, it will not result in psychological punishment or penalties from instructors, administrators, or colleagues.

Condition 9. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere in which people are encouraged to trust in themselves as well as in external sources. Teachers become less dependent upon expertise and authority when they can open up the self and when they feel that who they are is a valuable resource for learning. It is important that teachers know that they have something to bring to staff development rather than feeling that all learning means the acquisition of facts and knowledge from some external agent for use sometime in the future. People learn when they begin to see themselves as the wellsprings of ideas and alternatives to problems. Field based learning is facilitated when teachers begin to draw ideas from themselves and others rather than relying on the consultant, instructor, or administrator.

Condition 10. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere in which people feel they are respected. A field based staff development program in which high value is placed upon the individuality of teachers and upon the relationships that exist within the staff generates a caring atmosphere. A genuine expression of care and a warm emotional climate build an atmosphere of safety in which teachers can explore ideas and genuinely encounter each other without any threat. Confrontations and differences of opinion become constructive forces in a school staff development program in which teachers experience that they are respected as persons. A safe atmosphere need not exclude personal confrontations which often are effective catalysts for learning.

Condition 11. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere in which people feel they are accepted. People are free to change when they feel that change isn't being imposed upon them. It's paradoxical, but the more attempts are made to change teachers, the more resistant they become to change. A person must be before he/she can become. Accepting people means that we allow them to hold their values and to be themselves. When teachers do not have to defend themselves or their values, then they are free to take a look at themselves and

their values, and to change. An insistence on change contains an implicit note of rejection. In effect, we say to people - I can't accept you as you are; you must change. Teachers need to know they have an option--to change or not to change. They develop this feeling when they experience that they are accepted for who they are. When teachers or their values are attacked, it is natural that they will defend themselves. People who are busy defending themselves are not free to learn.

Condition 12. Field based learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which permits confrontation. With free and open communication, with a non-threatening psychological climate, the unique self of each person is expressed. It is inevitable that in such a situation teachers will confront each other, ideas will challenge ideas. Confrontations facilitate field based learning. They provide opportunities for teachers to have their ideas and themselves viewed and tested from the framework of colleagues. No individual learns in isolation from other people. Teachers' behavior changes and their ideas are refined and modified on the basis of the feedback they get from each other. Confrontation is a proving ground which enables ideas to be synthesized, new ideas to emerge, and teachers to change.

Condition 13. The most effective field based instructor is the instructor who creates the conditions by which he/she loses the teaching function. The person designated as "instructor" by creating an appropriate atmosphere and facilitative conditions gradually moves from being a dispenser of information to becoming a resource person and learner, and enables teachers to emerge more strongly as vital human resources and active learners. The facilitative elements which the field based instructor tries to foster lead to: free and open communication, confrontation, acceptance, respect, freedom from threat, the right to make mistakes, self-revelation, cooperation and collaboration, active and personal involvement, shared evaluation, and responsibility. Successful field based instruc-

tion succeeds by doing itself out of a job. It succeeds by becoming unnecessary, by producing professionals who no longer need to be taught, who break loose and swing free of the instructor and become self-moving.

Instructors create the climate for effective field based learning by becoming facilitators who view themselves as learners and authentically behave as learners. They reveal themselves as inquiring, questing, and valuing persons who convey spontaneity, curiosity, warmth and empathy; who listen and attend to others; who convey acceptance and respect; who understand affective as well as cognitive meanings and intents; who confront in a genuine and caring way. Such instructors create an atmosphere in which these qualities are internalized by teachers. To the degree that the field based instructor becomes a facilitator and a vibrant learner--to that degree will learning become enhanced. The field based instructor who teaches least teaches best.